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*touching hearts. enlivening minds.*



# **Finding God in Nature**

A Summer Program for Middle School Youth

## Lesson Plan—Week 1:

# Creation as God's First Communication

**Setting:** Evening program at church

**Central focus:** God created the world and everything in it to be good. Creation's goodness reflects his love, glory, and continued involvement in the world. Since Creation is an expression of God, it has inherent value.

### Materials needed

- *Connect!* student books or copies of the Student Book Resources for the young people
- art paper, one sheet for each participant
- markers
- index cards and pens, one of each for each participant
- snacks (optional)
- bonfire, lawn games, or water games for social time (optional)

### Preparation

- Make note of timing and the weather forecast, and plan an alternate activity for "Watching the Sunset–Reflection" if necessary. Some suggestions are provided.

## Format of the event

**Opening Prayer** (Leader Resources, p. 12)

**Engage Activity** (Leader Resources, pp. 12–13)

**Core Content** (Leader Resources, pp. 13–14)

"The Journey of Creation" (Student Book Resources, pp. 23–24)

"Check This Out" (Student Book Resources, p. 25)

**Core Learning Activity** (Leader Resources, pp. 14–15)

**Short Break**



**Watching the Sunset–Reflection**

Gather the youth where they can watch the sunset. If timing or weather does not permit, you can exchange this activity for watching a YouTube video of a sunset on a large screen, watching the ocean, watching a thunderstorm, instructing the young people to find photos of the sunset on their phones or in magazines, and share them with one another. Adapt the reflection questions as necessary based on your circumstances.

Explain the purpose of the activity:

- “Spread out and find a place to sit. It may be tempting to talk, but try to focus just on the sunset.”
- “While you’re watching, what do you notice in what you see (in the sky and around you)? Does it invoke any particular thoughts or feelings?”
- Invite the young people to share thoughts, feelings, or things they noticed while watching the sunset. (“If the sunset didn’t strike you, have there been other moments where you suddenly notice something that makes you stop in awe?”)
- “Is seeing a sunset the same as looking at a picture or having someone describe it to you?”
- “Sometimes it’s easy to dismiss blue skies and red sunsets as scientific phenomena, but when we see them, they can still invoke a feeling of awe and wonder, just like seeing a mountain range or the ocean. We stand before the glory of God and are left appropriately speechless.”

**Session Wrap-Up** (Leader Resources, p. 15)

**Closing Prayer** (Leader Resources, p. 12, Student Book Resources, p. 26)

**Challenge**

“During the next few weeks (until the next session), try to be attentive for a moment when you see nature reflecting the goodness, love, or glory of God. Take a picture, share it, and bring it next time!”

**Bonfire and Social Time**

S’mores are always a great addition to a summer gathering! If weather and/or setting do not permit a bonfire, you can have popsicles and lawn games or water games.



## Lesson Plan—Week 2:

# Our Role as Stewards of the Earth

**Setting:** Daytime program at church and service project in the community

**Central focus:** God gave us a special role to act as stewards of Creation. This means that we should act prudently and use our natural resources responsibly (rather than exploiting creation for unnecessary gain). We can make simple choices and take certain actions as stewards.

### Materials needed

- the video [“CST 101: Care for God’s Creation” \(3:05\) from Catholic Relief Services](#), available on YouTube
- *Connect!* student books or copies of Student Book Resources for youth and copies of prayer of Saint Teresa of Ávila
- any items (gardening gloves, trash bags, etc.) needed for the planned service activity
- poster board or newsprint and markers
- index cards and pens, one of each for each participant
- lunches (either church-sponsored or instruct youth to pack their own), depending on your timing

### Preparation

- Arrange some type of service project (in the local community) that relates to the topic of stewardship. Try to choose something that will introduce the young people to new volunteer possibilities they can engage in on their own and a new understanding of roles that “good stewards” can take. Some examples may include Adopt-a-Highway; helping at a recycling center, co-op, or nature preserve; cleaning a beach; etc.
- Arrange volunteer drivers/chaperones as necessary for transportation to/from the service activity.

## Format of the event

### Overview/Introduction to the Day

- Did anyone bring pictures or have an experience they want to share in response to the challenge last time?
- Review the main points of the last session:
  - Creation has inherent value.
  - Creation reflects God.

### Opening Prayer (Leader Resources, p. 16)

### Engage Activity

"Caring for Creation" (Leader Resources, p. 17)

### Core Content (Leader Resources, p. 18)

"Catholic Social Teaching" (Student Book Resources, pp. 27-31)

### Core Learning Activity–Service Activity

Introduce your planned service activity. Assign car rides/chaperones for transportation to/from the service activity if necessary.

### Lunch

### Reflection

- "Are there any thoughts, reflections, or reactions you'd like to share about our service project?"
- "How were we acting as stewards of creation today?"
- "One problem can have many solutions. How can we be stewards in other areas of our lives? What are some simple things we can do in our daily lives?"
- Create a list of "Simple Stewardship" ideas on a sheet of poster board or large sheet of newsprint. Brainstorm as a large group. If necessary, make some suggestions the young people may not have considered to get them thinking creatively.
- "Proper use of creation is not an overnight, all-or-nothing challenge. It doesn't mean you have to become a woodland hermit who never uses electricity and only forages on wild berries! It means we must be careful and thoughtful in our use of resources and respectful of our treatment of creation."



**Session Wrap-Up** (Leader Resources, p. 18)**Closing Prayer**

1. Direct the participants to find the prayer of Saint Teresa of Ávila on page 53 of their student book, or distribute copies of the prayer from the Student Book Resources, p.32.
2. Pray the prayer together as a group.
3. Close by making the Sign of the Cross.

**Challenge**

“Try to use one or more of the simple stewardship ideas we came up with, and post your experience or let us know next time how it went.”



## Lesson Plan—Week 3:

# Finding God—Creation as It Is Meant to Be Enjoyed

**Setting:** Day trip to nature trail, park, and/or lake

**Central focus:** Creation reflects God, and because we have a special role in the created order, we can come to know God through nature. God speaks to us through creation, and we can glorify God through our approach to nature. (Creation points to the Creator, and it is God who is to be the object of our worship.) Immersing ourselves in that which reflects God is one way we can more readily enter God's presence and engage in prayer.

### Materials needed

- *Connect!* student books or copies of the Student Book Resources for the young people
- Bibles (or copies of Psalm 8)

### Preparation

- Arrange a social activity for the conclusion of the day and your time together. This should be a simple summertime activity. This doesn't need to be a big catechetical lesson. The point should be the young people enjoying nature in a simple way. Some ideas include swimming at a lake, having a picnic at a state park, going canoeing at a lake or river, or camping.
- Prepare necessary chaperones, permission slips, and transportation in advance.
- Advise youth and parents ahead of time to wear/bring appropriate clothing for the nature hike and planned social activity, including good walking shoes, a reusable water bottle, sunscreen, etc.



## Format of the event

### Overview/Introduction to the Day

- “Did anyone have an experience of simple stewardship from the last time that they’d like to share?”
- Review the main points of last session:
  - What is stewardship?
  - Why are we called to be stewards of creation?

**Opening Prayer** (Leader Resources, p. 19)

**Engage Activity** (Leader Resources, p. 20)

**Core Content** (Leader Resources, pp. 20-21)

“What Is Prayer?” (Student Book Resources, pp. 33-34)

“God Is with Us” (Student Book Resources, pp. 34-36)

“When to Pray” (Student Book Resources, p. 36)

### Core Learning Activity

Solitary or small-group nature hike

Lay out the following guidelines for the hike:

- “You can bring a notebook and pen or pencil but no technology! Put your phones on do not disturb and resist the temptation to pull them out.”
- “While you’re hiking, try to remain silent. This is about trying to connect with God, not chatting with friends!”
- “Spread out!”
- “While you’re hiking, try to use your senses to observe your surroundings. What do you . . . see? Smell? Hear? Touch?”
- “Feel free to stop and linger in one place if you feel so inclined. This isn’t about the physical action—it’s about observation. It’s about connecting





with God as he is expressed through nature.”

### Reflection

After the youth reconvene, ask them to share their observations.

- Maybe it has something to do with stewardship (or an area where someone else abused their role as a steward!).
- Maybe it was a particularly impressive tree/rock/plant/animal.
- Maybe it was a moment where they had a new insight about God, their relationship with God, creation, or stewardship.
- Catechesis/application
  - God speaks to humans through visible creation.
  - Creation points to God’s glory, and it can lead us to glorify God.

### Session Wrap-Up

Remind the young people about the themes of all three weeks:

- Creation is God’s first communication with humankind.
- By acting as stewards of creation, we take God’s loving gift to us and offer it back to God. We care for it as God does.
- Creation glorifies God, and we are invited to glorify God with it.

### Closing Prayer

1. Direct the participants to find “Check This Out” on p. 204 in their student book and read it together.
2. Distribute Bibles or a copy of Psalm 8. Depending on the size of your group, you can go in a circle and have each participant read one verse aloud, or designate a leader and have the rest of the group repeat verse 2 as a refrain between each stanza (much like the Psalm response during Mass).
3. Pray the Psalm together.
4. Close by making the Sign of the Cross.

### Social Activity

This should be a simple summertime activity. It doesn’t need to involve a big catechetical lesson. The point should be the youth enjoying nature in a simple way. Some ideas include swimming at a lake, having a picnic at a state park, going canoeing at a lake or river, or camping.



# Leader Resources

## Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the participants discover that God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—is the Creator of all things, visible and invisible, as we say in the Creed. Although God created the world to be good, evil exists. Evil is not of God, nor is evil desired by God. His saving power is revealed as he brings about good from evil in his ongoing work of creation. God will bring all creation to perfection through his Son, Jesus Christ.

## Background for the Catechist

“I believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible” (*Roman Missal*). As disciples of Jesus Christ, we state this Creed of faith and reject a worldview that does not allow for God, angels, Heaven, miracles, and the Holy Spirit. Every time we go to Church or pray the Rosary, we affirm our belief in invisible realities!

Science has done a wonderful job teaching us about the wonders and beauty of God’s creation. Science can tell us the “what” or the “how” of the material universe, but it has no competency in the area of the “why” of the universe—and even less about things invisible. These things rightfully belong to philosophers and theologians. The account of Creation found in the Book of Genesis, then, is not a scientific treatise about the material world but is instead a thoroughly religious statement that all that exists has God as its author. So the great truth about creation is not about what things are or are not, but how all things find their rightful place in relationship with God and one another.

As was taught in previous chapters, the biblical authors used symbol and metaphor to reveal to humanity truths that transcend time—truths that speak to every time and place and have done so from the beginning. These include the truth of God’s goodness, human sin, the tragedy of suffering, and God’s grace and redemption. Creation, therefore, is not an event bound in time. It is happening in every moment all the time! God is forever the creating Creator who invites his creation to participate in his great work—not only of creation but also of redemption.

## Catechist’s Prayer

Loving God, you created me, the young people I serve, and the world out of goodness and love. Help me share that love with the young people. Help me see in myself, in the young people, and in the world the good that you created and that you see. Lord, help me be created anew this and every day. Amen.

### Teaching Tip

When discussing creation, realize that the participants are being asked to move away from a strictly scientific, historical, literal understanding or interpretation of Genesis. You are calling them to the fuller understanding of creation as an ongoing act, and the biblical account as symbol or metaphor for the eternal reality. An understanding of creation as an ongoing act in no way negates God’s initial creative act, nor does it ask us to reject the biblical story—but it does certainly demand that we come to a fuller understanding that is aligned with the Church’s teaching.

## Getting Ready

Connect! Bringing Faith to Life, pages 34–43

### Core Understanding

God is the Creator of all things, and Creation is not simply one event that happened a long time ago but is the ongoing work of God.

### Materials Needed

- Bibles, one for each participant
- art paper, one sheet for each participant
- markers
- index cards, one for each participant

### Key Words

- angel
- Creation
- Heaven and Earth

### Catechism Pillar

- The Creed

### Catechism Connection

- Paragraphs 279–324  
(The Creator and Creation)

### Opening Prayer (5 minutes)

1. **Make** the Sign of the Cross, and lead everyone in saying, “Let us remember that we are in the holy presence of God.” *(Pause.)*
2. **Pray** the following:
  - Creator God, out of goodness and love you created the universe and all that is in it. Help us, Creator, find our place within your vast creation. Help us know you, our connection to the universe, and the work you call us to do. Amen.
3. **Invite** the participants to offer any special intentions for which they would like to pray.
4. **Close** with the Sign of the Cross.

### Engage Activity (10 minutes)

1. **Explain** to the young people that you are going to describe a series of things. Invite them to imagine each thing as they hear you say it.
  - a falling star in the dark night sky, away from city lights
  - a beaver building a dam
  - a spectacular sunset

- people doing good things for others
  - friends having fun together
  - a family gathering to celebrate a special occasion
2. **Tell** the participants that some people recognize God’s goodness in everyday things like these.
  3. **Encourage** them to add to the list by naming things or events from everyday life that have made them recognize God’s goodness.
  4. **Invite** the young people to think to themselves about their answers to the following questions:
    - Have you ever wondered where everything that exists comes from?
    - Have you wondered why you exist or where you came from?
    - Do you sometimes question where the world is headed or where life is taking you?
  5. **Explain** that the first line of the Bible is a good place to begin looking for answers. Read Genesis 1:1:
    - “In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth.”
 Continue by explaining the significance of the verse:
    - This verse proclaims that God created the heavens and the Earth.
    - “Heaven and Earth” is a way of referring to the entire universe.
    - So the passage is saying that God created everything that exists.
  6. **Conclude** by explaining the following points:
    - Genesis proclaims that all of creation is good: “God looked at everything he had made, and found it very good” (1:31).
    - Creation is a gift. God created the world and all of us so that we might live in union with him.

### Core Content (15 minutes)

1. **Engage** the young people in a review of pages 37– 40 in the *Connect!* book by dividing the material into sections, such as the following:
  - “The Journey of Creation,” pages 39– 40
  - “Check this out,” page 42
2. **Assign** each young person one of the sections of material. They can read silently to themselves or gather in small groups with others who share the same assigned material. If opting for small-group reading, ask one person from each group to read the material aloud.
3. **Invite** volunteers to report key ideas from each section of the material to the large group. Be prepared to expand on the reports as necessary to ensure key concepts are covered.

## Teaching Tip

If collaborative reading and reporting is not the best choice for your group, consider using one of the following options or another of your choosing:

- **At-home reading option:** Invite the young people to read the chapter prior to the session.
- **In-session individual reading option:** Ask the participants to read the chapter during the session, or read it aloud to them.
- **Presentation option:** Give a short presentation that incorporates the key points listed on the handout “Chapter 4 Summary” on page 42 of this guide.

## Core Learning Activity (20 minutes)

### God’s Gift

**Objective:** To help the participants understand that God is the ultimate source of all created things and that humans create through secondary means.

1. **Explain** the following about Creation in these or similar words:
  - We say that God created Heaven and Earth and is the Creator of all things, but did God create my shoes or your chair or your book? When it comes to my shoes, your chair, or your book, humans used materials of the Earth to create those things, but where did humans come from? And where did the materials come from?
  - By thinking backward, we can come to understand that God was the first Creator in the beginning and that humans have been using God’s creation ever since to recreate! For this activity, we’re going to examine our everyday things and work backward to God as their source. In this way, we can see that everything we have is a gift from God.
2. **Distribute** to each person a sheet of art paper and some markers. Announce a moment of silence, and then lead the group in the Lord’s Prayer (see “Appendix A: Catholic Prayers” in the *Connect!* book). Tell the participants:
  - When we ask God to give us this day our daily bread, we are recognizing that God is the source of everything that is. Yes, we might grow the wheat, harvest the wheat, make the flour, make the bread dough, and then bake it. But God provided the Earth, sun, rain, plants, and brains that we use!
3. **Give** the young people the following directions:
  - Choose one object that you need and use every day. It could be clothes, food, your bed, or your cell phone. Draw that thing on the far-right side of your paper. Then, just to the left of it, draw the people and machines that created it. Next, to the left of that, draw the raw materials needed to make it. Then, to the left of that, draw the fields or forests or mines that the raw materials came from.
  - The final picture on the left side of your paper should be an image of God, who created the Earth and these resources.

4. **Invite** volunteers to share their pictures of God's gift to them.
5. **Conclude** by reminding everyone that we are grateful to God for all that we have in the world and are called to be creative as God is creative. We are also called to create responsibly and morally, creating only those things that benefit the human family.

## Watching the Sunset - Reflection

### Session Wrap-Up (5 minutes)

1. **Invite** volunteers to share key things they learned during the session. Ensure that the following points are made:
  - God is the source of all life and the Creator of all things.
  - Creation is not simply one event that happened a long time ago but is the ongoing work of God.
2. **Distribute** the index cards. Instruct the participants to write the first sentence of Genesis 1:26 on their cards:
  - "Then God said: Let us make human beings in our image, after our likeness."Then direct them to write these questions on their cards:
  - What does it mean to me to hear that I've been created in God's image? What difference does or could this make in my life?
3. **Direct** the young people to take the cards home and refer to them a few times during the week. Ask them to read the verse and answer the question for themselves or to share their cards with friends or family members and discuss their answers with them.

### Closing Prayer (5 minutes)

1. **Direct** the participants to find "Connect with God" on page 35 in their books (or page 26 of the Student Book Resources). Invite them to read it aloud together.
2. **Close** by making the Sign of the Cross.

## Challenge

## Social Time

## Getting Ready

*Connect! Bringing Faith to Life, pages 522–534*

### Core Understanding

We all have a duty to work together for justice and the common good by living the truths of Catholic social teaching.

### Materials Needed

- one or more skeins of yarn
- index cards, one for each participant

### Key Words

- common good
- social justice
- solidarity

### Catechism Pillar

- Christian Morality and Justice

### Catechism Connection

- Paragraphs 1905–1912, 1927 (The Common Good)
- Paragraphs 1913–1917 (Responsibility and Participation)
- Paragraphs 1928–1938 (Social Justice)
- Paragraphs 1939–1942, 1944, 1948 (Human Solidarity)
- Paragraphs 2419–2425 (The Social Doctrine of the Church)
- Paragraphs 2443–2449 (Love for the Poor)

### Opening Prayer (5 minutes)

1. **Make** the Sign of the Cross, and lead everyone in saying, “Let us remember that we are in the holy presence of God.” *(Pause.)*
2. **Pray** the following:
  - Lord, help us see ourselves in the eyes of everyone we meet. Help us look beyond our own wants to see our neighbors’ needs as we work to form a loving community. Help us remember to give with our whole hearts without expecting a reward or recognition. Help us recognize the God-given human dignity of every person we meet. Amen.
3. **Invite** the participants to offer any special intentions for which they would like to pray.
4. **Close** with the Sign of the Cross.



## Engage Activity: Caring for Creation (20 minutes)

### Materials Needed

- the video “CST 101: Care for God’s Creation” (3:05), available on YouTube

**Objective:** To reflect on the gift of creation and the call to care for this gift.

1. **Read** aloud, or invite one or more participants to read aloud, Genesis 1:26–31. Highlight the following idea from the passage:
  - God gave human beings dominion over the animals—all the fish, the birds, and the creatures that walk on land.
2. **Write** *dominion* where all can see. Ask for volunteers to share their understanding of the common meaning of *dominion* (control, superiority, domination).
3. **Explain** to the young people that the Book of Genesis was written in Hebrew and that our text is a translation. Note that scholars who study the Hebrew language and how best to translate it emphasize that the common English language notion of dominion isn’t an exact translation. Instead of thinking about control and domination, the idea of “taking care of” something is closer in meaning.
4. **Announce** that you are going to show a 3-minute video on caring for the Earth. Let everyone know that after viewing you will ask them to describe one scene or idea that especially caught their attention. Play the video “CST 101: Care for God’s Creation.”
5. **Facilitate** the participants’ sharing of the aspects of the video that caught their attention.
6. **Highlight** the idea that caring for the Earth and caring for other people are related. Consider reshowing the segment in which Carolyn Woo talks about poor people being hurt most when creation suffers (begin at 1:27).
7. **Conclude** by reminding the young people about the theme of gift. Recall that we hear that theme in Genesis and also in the video: All creation is a gift from God, and we are called to take care of this gift.



## Core Content (15 minutes)

1. **Engage** the young people in a review of pages 524 – 532 in the *Connect!* book by dividing the material into sections, such as the following:
  - “Catholic Social Teaching” (first five paragraphs), pages 528–530
  - “Catholic Social Teaching” (last paragraph on page 530 to the end), pages 530 – 532
2. **Assign** each young person one of the sections of material. They can read silently to themselves or gather in small groups with others who share the same assigned material. If opting for small-group reading, ask one person from each group to read the material aloud.
3. **Invite** volunteers to report key ideas from each section of the material to the large group. Be prepared to expand on the reports as necessary to ensure key concepts are covered.

### Teaching Tip

If collaborative reading and reporting is not the best choice for your group, consider using one of the following options or another of your choosing:

- **At-home reading option:** Invite the young people to read the chapter prior to the session.
- **In-session individual reading option:** Ask the participants to read the chapter during the session, or read it aloud to them.
- **Presentation option:** Give a short presentation that incorporates the key points listed on the handout “Chapter 9 Summary” on page 98 of this guide.

## Core Learning Activity: Service Activity

### Reflection

### Session Wrap-Up (5 minutes)

1. **Invite** volunteers to share key things they learned during the session. Ensure that the following point is made:
  - We all have a duty to work together for justice and the common good by living the truths of Catholic social teaching.
2. **Distribute** the index cards. Instruct the participants to write the following question on their cards:
  - What is one thing I can do to work toward the common good in my daily life?
3. **Direct** the young people to take the cards home and refer to them a few times during the week. Ask them to answer the question for themselves or to share their cards with friends or family members and discuss their answers with them.

## Closing Prayer

## Challenge

## Getting Ready

Connect! Bringing Faith to Life, pages 212–222

### Core Understanding

Our response to God in prayer can take many forms, and the Church provides helpful guidance by recommending five basic types: petition, blessing, intercession, praise, and thanksgiving.

### Materials Needed

- Bibles, one for each participant
- index cards, one for each participant

### Key Words

- blessing
- intercession
- thanksgiving

### Catechism Pillar

- Prayer

### Catechism Connection

- Paragraph 971  
(Devotion to the Blessed Virgin)
- Paragraphs 1174–1178  
(The Liturgy of the Hours)
- Paragraphs 2626–2628  
(Blessing and Adoration)
- Paragraphs 2629–2633  
(Prayer of Petition)
- Paragraphs 2634–2636  
(Prayer of Intercession)
- Paragraphs 2639–2643  
(Prayer of Praise)
- Paragraphs 2650–2662  
(The Tradition of Prayer)

### Opening Prayer (5 minutes)

1. **Make** the Sign of the Cross, and lead everyone in saying, “Let us remember that we are in the holy presence of God.” *(Pause.)*
2. **Pray** the following:
  - Lord Jesus, you invited your disciples to come with you and rest. You invite us to do the same. Help us be with you in prayer and talk to you and listen to you as our Friend and Brother. We ask this in your name, Lord Jesus. Amen.
3. **Invite** the participants to offer any special intentions for which they would like to pray.
4. **Close** with the Sign of the Cross.

## Engage Activity (10 minutes)

1. **Lead** a discussion with the young people, asking the following questions:
  - How do people your age communicate with friends and family? (*Telephone, cell phone, internet [visually and by email], texting. Some families communicate with notes, cards, and letters, especially on special occasions.*)
 Instruct a participant to list these ways where all can see.
2. **Continue** the discussion by asking the following question:
  - What things get in the way of communicating with friends and family? (*lack of time, too many other important things to do, sometimes less important things get in the way as distractions, taking family and friends for granted*)
3. **Remind** the young people that when obstacles spring up, we must get down to basics and realize that family and friends are important in our lives.
4. **Explain** that the same things happen when communicating with God. We can communicate with God instantaneously. We do not need devices of any kind, or even pen and paper. Yet we don't always make the effort because other things get in the way. When this happens, we have to get down to basics and realize that God is important in our lives. He is the very reason we exist, and communicating with God—prayer—helps us become the people we were meant from all eternity to be.
5. **Invite** volunteers to share responses to the following questions:
  - If you had a favorite prayer as a child, what was it?
  - If you remember how you learned to pray, who taught you and how did they teach you?
  - If you have a favorite prayer today, what is it?
6. **Share** with the participants your own answers to the questions. Encourage them to take a quiet moment to say their favorite prayers (or try someone else's favorite if they don't have one) at least once at home and once during the day at school.

## Core Content (15 minutes)

1. **Engage** the young people in a review of pages 204–210 in the *Connect!* book by dividing the material into sections, such as the following:
  - “What Is Prayer?,” pages 204–205
  - “God Is with Us,” pages 205–207
  - “When to Pray,” page 207
2. **Assign** each young person one of the sections of material. They can read silently to themselves or gather in small groups with others who share the same assigned material. If opting for small-group reading, ask one person from each group to read the material aloud.
3. **Invite** volunteers to report key ideas from each section of the material to the large group. Be prepared to expand on the reports as necessary to ensure key concepts are covered.

## Teaching Tip

If collaborative reading and reporting is not the best choice for your group, consider using one of the following options or another of your choosing:

- **At-home reading option:** Invite the young people to read the chapter prior to the session.
- **In-session individual reading option:** Ask the participants to read the chapter during the session, or read it aloud to them.
- **Presentation option:** Give a short presentation that incorporates the key points listed on the handout “Chapter 20 Summary” on page 191 of this guide.

## Core Learning Activity: Nature Hike

### Reflection

### Session Wrap-Up

### Closing Prayer

### Social Activity





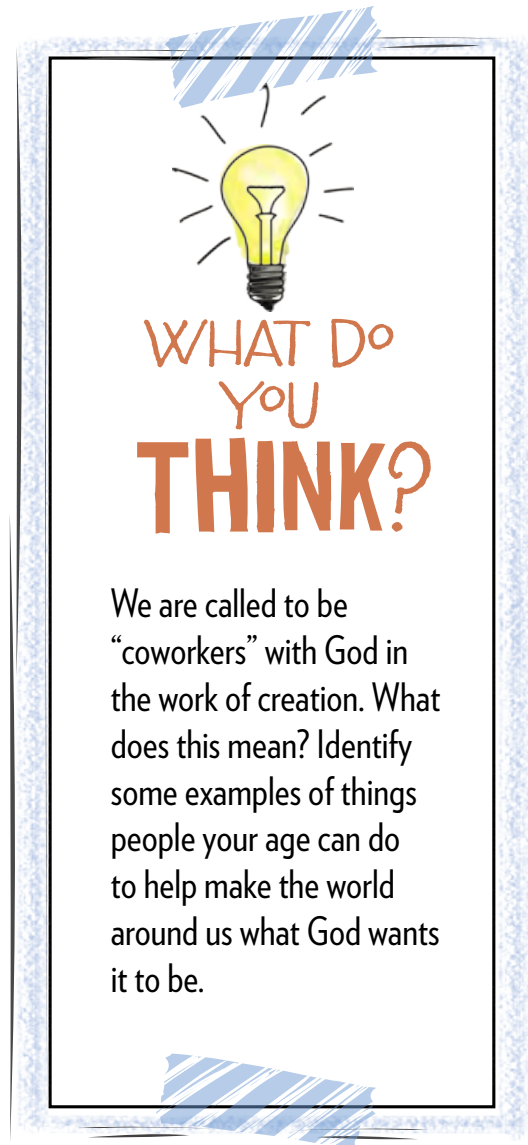
# Student Book Resources

The high point of God's plan for creation is Jesus Christ. In him, God became man to save us. Christ is sometimes called the New Creation because he came to give us new life. He came to restore and deepen our union with God.

## The Journey of Creation

It is helpful to keep in mind that creation is not simply one event that happened a long time ago. God's love and presence are never-ending, and his work of creation keeps going. One way to imagine this is to think of the universe as a journey. God has a map for the journey and is guiding creation to a final end. Can you imagine all things being perfect and everyone being completely happy? This is the destiny of the human race. Everything has been created for our good. This means that among all creatures, human beings are most valuable in God's eyes. This special place in creation comes with a special responsibility (see Genesis 1:28).

We trust in God's plan, but that doesn't mean we go about our lives just waiting for it to unfold. We have a part to play. We have a special role on this journey. We must keep our eyes open so we recognize God's presence in our lives and the world around us. What's more, we are called to cooperate with God and be his coworkers. This means



We are called to be "coworkers" with God in the work of creation. What does this mean? Identify some examples of things people your age can do to help make the world around us what God wants it to be.

we share in the responsibility of helping the world around us be what God wants it to be—a place where love rules. Our challenge is to think about God’s desires for the world and all his creatures. We must make choices about our relationships and our care of the Earth that are in line with God’s will. We don’t do this on our own, however, apart from God. Through the Holy Spirit, God is always at work in our actions.

## The Role of the Trinity in Creation

When we talk about God as Creator, we are referring to all three Divine Persons of the Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We associate Creation most closely with God the Father, but it is important to remember that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit together are one God. If we think of the Father creating alone, we can make the mistake of thinking Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit came into being after the Father and are not one with him, even today. Saint Irenaeus offers a helpful image. He emphasizes that creation is the work of all three Persons of the Trinity by referring to the Son and the Spirit as the hands of the Father. God the Father keeps the universe going through his Word, Jesus Christ, and through the creative power of the Holy Spirit, the Giver of Life.

One symbol for the Trinity is an equilateral triangle—with three sides of equal length. This signifies that all three Persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—are equal. The one triangle emphasizes that the Persons are unified and that they are one God.

## The Visible and the Invisible

When we pray the Nicene Creed, we acknowledge God as the maker of both what is visible and what is invisible. We recognize that there is more to creation than the material things we can see and touch. Knowing of an invisible part of reality opens us up to the miraculous.





## LIVING the GOSPEL

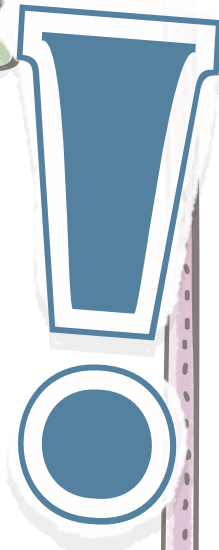
### Share God's Creation

Use a camera or phone to take pictures of things that offer glimpses of the goodness of creation. Share your photos with friends or family. Remember to thank God for all the goodness he has given us in creation.

## CHECK this OUT

### Creation and Creationism

Perhaps you have heard the word *creationism* in news stories or discussions about the way the creation of the world should be explained in public school classrooms. Creationists read the Bible like a science textbook and believe that the accounts of Creation in Genesis are scientifically accurate. Creationists believe God created everything in a matter of days. This leads them to completely discount evolution, the scientific theory that life has changed over time from earlier forms of life. Catholic teaching about Creation differs. Catholics don't read Genesis like a science textbook, recognizing that biblical writers didn't write scientific reports. If we were to read the accounts of Creation as science, we would miss the main points and set up unintended conflicts between faith and science.



**T**hink about the following: A falling star in the dark night sky, away from city lights. A beaver building a dam. A spectacular sunset. People doing good things for others. Friends having fun together. A family gathering to celebrate a special occasion. Have these or similar events from everyday life ever made you recognize God's goodness? Have you ever wondered where everything that exists has come from? Have you wondered why you exist or where you came from? Do you sometimes question where the world is headed or where life is taking you?



## CONNECT with GOD

Lord, God of all creation, thank you for everything you have created and everything you have given me. Help me recognize my own goodness. Continue to bless all your people as we strive to understand your will for our lives and as we care for all creation. Amen.



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when a prominent person was parading down the street. Jesus advises a different strategy of giving. We should give people what they need without taking away their pride and without trying to show off. Giving money, goods, and respect to people in need is a work of justice pleasing to God.

Each person has God-given dignity because each person is created in God's image. To maintain that dignity, we all must work for the common good. We must create and support institutions that improve human conditions. Society works for the common good and helps bring about social justice when it provides what people need, as individuals or as groups, to live out their God-given dignity.

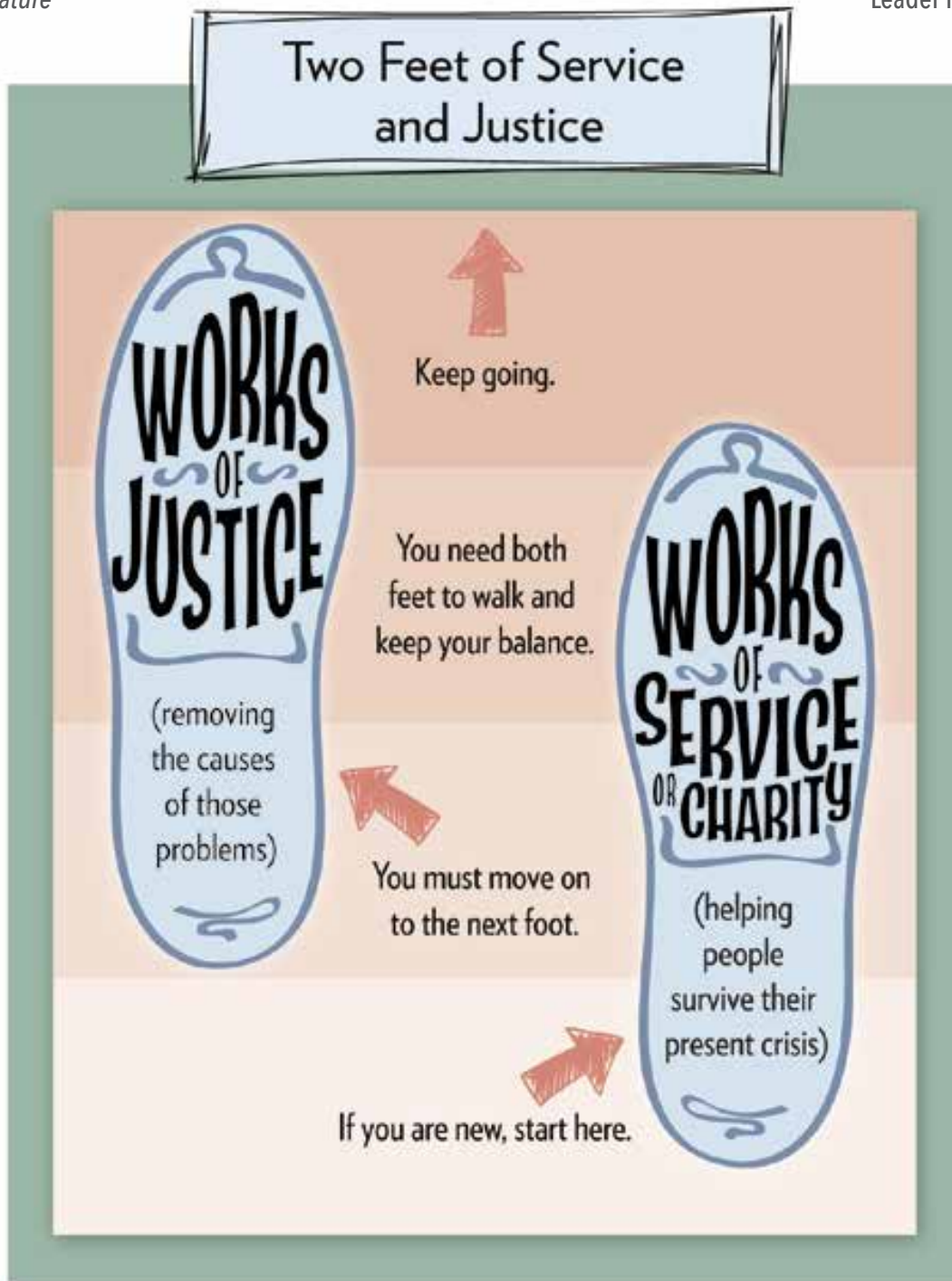
Today, in many countries around the world, people continue to struggle for justice. Their problems are complex and far bigger than any one person—or even the people of one country—can overcome alone. Although local, state, and national governments must work for the common good, we also need to organize society to work for justice on a global level. International federations such as the United Nations (UN) and charitable organizations like Catholic Relief Services (CRS) offer hope that injustice can be overcome when people come together.

## Catholic Social Teaching

Catholic social teaching is the Church's teachings about building a just society and living as Christians amid the many challenges of modern society. It offers a vision of how we are to see and treat others and care for the environment to which God has entrusted us.



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Our moral vision of society begins with respect for human life and dignity. We are made in God’s image, gifted with a soul, and redeemed by Jesus. So we all share equal dignity, and we are all entitled to all the rights God intended humans to have. That goes for unborn babies, people dying in hospitals, and criminals in jail.


Catholic social teaching is concerned with making sure all people have what they need—food, clothing, shelter, health care, respect, education, work, community, freedom, and all the fundamental rights that flow from human dignity—to live out the vocation God calls them to.

A good test for our society is to see how our poorest and weakest, or most vulnerable, members are doing. It is a social sin when the gap between the rich and the poor is so great that some people live in extreme luxury while others go without food, jobs, homes, or health care. These inequalities are sinful. The gap between those who are rich and those who are poor in our world grows bigger every day, so we must work hard to bridge that sinful gap. We say the Church has an “option for the poor and vulnerable.” This means the Church, like Jesus, who loved and helped so many people in need, must get involved in economic and social matters when people’s rights or their relationships with God are being threatened. Jesus tells us he was sent “to bring glad tidings to the poor” (Luke 4:18). All people deserve a share in the goodness of this world, because the goodness of this world is a sign and preparation for the ultimate and eternal Good, who is God.

It’s great news when good jobs and wages bring people out of poverty. Work should be more than something people do for a paycheck. Our work is valuable not because of the work itself but because we are of infinite value. So anything we do is also of infinite value. Through our work, whatever it is, we participate in God’s work of creation. This brings dignity to work. When we unite our work to Christ, our work can help bring us and others to God. This means workers should never be taken for granted. They should have fair wages, the right to join unions, and the ability to start their own businesses.

Everyone is our brother and sister: from a child stitching soccer balls in China to an unborn baby in a womb to an old woman suffering from hunger in Africa. Their needs are ours. Living in **solidarity** means



**solidarity**  A close relationship or unity with others. Living in solidarity means we share with people who are poor or powerless not only our material goods but also our friendship and prayers.



not only that we share our material goods through charity but also that we share our friendship and prayers with other people.

In Pope Francis's encyclical "All Brothers [and Sisters]" ("Fratelli Tutti"), he encourages each one of us to think of one another as members of "a single human family" and as "brothers and sisters all" in human solidarity and true friendship ("All Brothers [and Sisters]," 8). Earlier in the twentieth century, Pope Saint Paul VI taught us, "If you want Peace, work for Justice" ("Message of His Holiness Pope Paul VI for the Celebration of the Day of Peace"). Our efforts for justice can prevent wars and bring unity to a divided world.

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## WHAT DO YOU THINK?

In the Creation account in the Book of Genesis, God gave dominion, or authority, over creation. What choices have humans made that help preserve the environment? What choices have hurt the environment? What choices can you make to help care for God's creation?

We also need to be one with the Earth itself. In the Book of Genesis, God tells us to care for all creation. It's time for all of us to be good stewards of the land, water, plants, and animals. Keep in mind the wisdom of the Iroquois, a league of a league of Indigenous nations in America. They advocate for making decisions based on how our choices will affect the next seven generations. The changes we make now to conserve energy, water, and other resources will have a lasting effect on generations of people to come after us.



## PRAYING TOGETHER

### Do You Have Ears to Hear?

Be an intense listener at Mass. When you hear a reading from a prophet like Isaiah, think about his words of hope and to whom he was giving hope. Close your eyes when you listen to the Gospel and think about the people in the stories. What kind of fear or despair did they feel? What did victims, outcasts, and sinners hope that Jesus would do or say?

At its root, the word *compassion* means “to suffer with.” Listen with compassion, feel the pain, and experience the joy Jesus brings.

# PRAYING TOGETHER

## Mixing Water and Wine

During Mass there comes a moment when the priest pours a little bit of water into the wine. As he does this, he whispers something that the assembly usually cannot hear. He prays, “By the mystery of this water and wine / may we come to share in the divinity of Christ / who humbled himself to share in our humanity.” This mixing of the water and wine is a gesture that reminds us that the Son of God, the Second Divine Person of the Trinity, became one of us. The priest also prays that we ourselves will come to share in the divinity of Christ. We do that by receiving the Eucharist and also by living our faith so one day we will once again be in full union with God.

Christ is the model of the perfect human being. It is our destiny to live as he did. By doing God’s will, we can become like Christ—his image for others to see. The following prayer, thought to be written by Saint Teresa of Ávila, says it best:

Christ has no body now but yours,  
     no hands but yours,  
     no feet but yours.  
 Yours are the eyes through which  
     Christ’s compassion must look  
     out on the world;  
 Yours are the feet with which  
     He is to go about doing good.  
 Yours are the hands with which  
     He is to bless us now.



## What Is Prayer?

When you were a young child, your parents probably chose your friends for you. You played together, sharing toys and doing fun things. Now that you are older, friendships mean something different. You can choose your own friends, and the conversations go beyond the sandbox or playground to deeper subjects. The more time you spend with a person, the more you have to talk about: movies, sports, school, people you know. You share good times, as well as problems you have. Good friends never run out of things to say to each other.

### CHECK *this* OUT

#### The Psalms: Great Prayers for All Ages

Sacred Scripture tells us that people have been talking to God since he breathed life into Adam and Eve. In every book of the Bible, you will find both holy people and sinners who call out to God for help. You can hear their voices praising God, giving thanks for all he has done for them. Check out the Psalms for some of the greatest prayers of all time. Like different types of music, they help us express some of the same emotions and concerns people have had for three thousand years.

The following are a few psalms and their subjects:

- Psalm 3: Morning Prayer for Help
- Psalm 10: A Prayer for Justice
- Psalm 59: A Prayer for Safety
- Psalm 85: A Prayer for the Nation's Welfare
- Psalm 95: A Song of Praise
- Psalm 102: The Prayer of a Troubled Youth
- Psalm 141: An Evening Prayer

Likewise, when you were a young child, your parents introduced you to God. Since then, you have been learning more about God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit, through the Church. For thousands of years, the Holy Spirit has been teaching the children of God to pray. The Holy Spirit teaches us through Sacred Tradition, the living transmission of God's truth to us. The Holy Spirit in the Church keeps the lines of divine communication open between us and God.

God is always inviting us to connect with him through prayer. Any time you take a moment to raise your heart and mind to God, you are praying. When you take the time to tell God about your day, share your worries, ask for advice, or request good things from him, God is listening. Like any good relationship, the more time you spend with God in prayer, the easier the conversation. You never run out of things to say to each other.

## God Is with Us

God never gets tired of wanting to be with us. The key to a growing relationship is being with someone: spending time together, talking, and listening to each other. Starting with Genesis, the first book of the Bible, we hear the stories of God calling and humans responding. Abraham and God made a sacred agreement, or covenant, with each other. One of the translations of the name of God, Yahweh, is "I am the One who is with you." Moses argued with God because he did not like the assignment to lead God's people out of Egypt. But God remained with Moses and his people. The prophets complained to God too but responded to his call. God never abandoned his chosen messengers. We know Jesus and his Father talked with each other throughout Jesus' life on Earth. The history

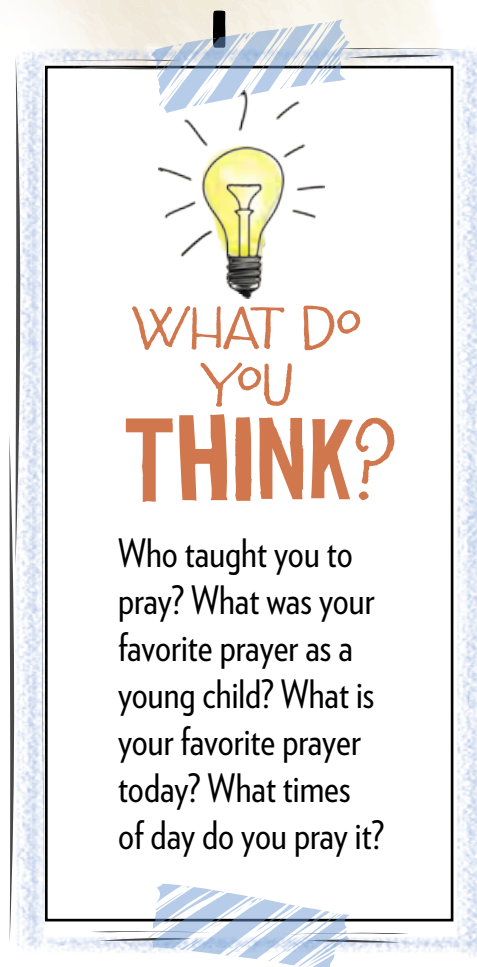
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of God's people shows us that prayer is always a back-and-forth exchange. God, who is always with us, reaches out to get our attention, and we respond.

God is always with us, but unless we stop to take time to really reflect, we can fail to recognize the power of grace—God's presence in our lives. This time might take just a few moments, or we might spend a longer time. When we pray, we take the time to reflect on how God is with us in our lives. No matter what our circumstances, prayer can help us to be thankful, hopeful, joyful, and confident of God's help (see 1 Thessalonians 5:16). As Saint Paul once wrote, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31).

Prayer is knowing in faith that God is with us. When we take time to give thanks to God for a new day, we are praying. When we stop to admire something in nature, we praise God, our Creator. Any time we acknowledge that God is the source of blessings in our lives, we raise our minds and hearts to God.



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We are taking time for God, who is already with us and trying to get our attention. Because God blesses us, we bless him in return.

## When to Pray

Because God is always communicating with us, are we supposed to pray non-stop? That is exactly what Paul tells us. We are to pray constantly. Prayer is as essential to our soul as air is to our bodies. Because nothing can separate us from the love of God, it is always possible to pray. Prayer and our Christian lives cannot be separated.

If you are always praying, when would you go to school, spend time with other friends, or get your homework done? How about sports or other activities or just having fun? How can you pray when you are sleeping? Isn't it impossible to pray to God at every moment of every day?

Because God is always communicating with us, just being open to his presence is an act of prayer. We grow in our faith and our spirituality by being aware that God is loving us throughout our day. The more often we recall God's presence, the more we experience the benefits of an active prayer life. Just as your mind and heart are always working even when you are not thinking about it, your soul is always at work too.

good  
to KNOW



Humans breathe more than twenty-three thousand times each day. Without that air coming into and leaving our bodies, we cannot live. Just being aware of our breathing can be an act of prayer. A very calming form of prayer called centering prayer often begins with breathing in the name Jesus, holding the breath for two or three seconds, then breathing out the words *peace* or *love*. Praying this way can lead to a deep sense of God's presence.